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CORBAN.

I. INTRODUCTION.

JOSEPHUS says: "Theophrastus shows knowledge of Jewish customs when he says the laws of the Tyrians prevent the swearing of foreign oaths; and among them with some others he reckons the oath called Corban. Now this will be found among no people save only the Jews, and it means (as one might say), being translated out of the language of the Hebrews, *gift of God*¹." There is no indication that this is a grudging admission wrung from the apologist of Judaism by a triumphant opponent. It is regarded as a piece of indisputable evidence, that the historian named was acquainted with Jewish customs.

Elsewhere Josephus implies that the formula was used by those who vowed themselves to God in accordance with the directions of the Levitical code². "And those who name themselves Corban to God (now this signifies gift in the language of the Greeks), if they wish to be released³ from the service must pay down money to the priests, . . . but, in the case of such as have less than the requisite fixed sum of money⁴; it is lawful for the priests to decide

¹ Josephus against Apion, i. §§ 166 f. (Niese).

² Lev. xxvii. 1.

³ ἀφίεσθαι.

⁴ See Lev. xxvii. 1.

as they will¹." Here Corban is a vow of self-devotion from which a man may be released in accordance with the Law.

The most famous example of the full formula is found in a passage of the Gospel according to St. Mark². There it is said that under certain conditions certain of the Scribes refused to release their disciples from this vow. Hence it has been inferred that this refusal was upheld by all Scribes under all conditions, and that the ruling was condemned by Rabbi Jesus of Nazareth and by him alone. It would be more in accordance with facts to say that, with the exception of Jesus himself, and Philo, and perhaps such zealots for the Law as the scholars of Shammai, every Rabbi of the time would have dissolved the vow in the circumstances specified, whether the man wished to be dispensed from it or not. The view that the Corban was a favourite device for evading a fundamental commandment, at which the priests or the Scribes connived—for a consideration, and which Jesus pilloried as it deserved, is a striking example of the exegesis which is dominated and directed by religious prejudice. The Rabbi has better right than the scholar, who accepts this tradition of the commentators, to say of his opponent in this cause, *tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*. But, since this view is prevalent and has provoked certain doubts about the authenticity and historicity of the narrative, it will be well to look a little at the life of the times, before we proceed to examine it in detail.

It is a far cry to the Palestine, in which Herod's temple was still a-building. The Christian Evangelists are not concerned to expound questions of Jewish Law, even if they had listened to them and have reported them with more patience than Gallio the pro-consul. To understand their narratives one must return—as best one may—to the land and the time, where and when these

¹ Josephus, *Ant.*, iv, § 73 (Niese).

² vii. 1-12.

things were done. The way is not easy; but there is a way. Doubtless the destruction of Jerusalem is a great gulf fixed between the present and the distant past. Doubtless the disciples of Jesus and the disciples of the Pharisees have long ago dissolved the partnership, to which the records of the Acts of the Apostles and the traditions—notably that which relates to James the brother of Jesus—bear witness. But Philo Judaeus will lead the student back to contemporary Alexandria; and thence he may go up to Jerusalem for the feasts, if he will. For though the guide wear the motley garb of an eclectic Greek philosopher, his heart and mind are the mind and heart of a Rabbi. *Cucullus non facit monachum*. For all his allegorizing and idealism, Philo's teaching is such as Shammai and Aqiba might have applauded or inspired. His devotion to the Nation and the doctrines of the Pharisees is as unquestionable as that of Saul who is also called Paul. Both had experienced the truth, to which Josephus gave verbal assent and expression, that the sect of the Pharisees has an essential affinity with Stoicism.

Israel was in captivity, but not now in a strange land. Out of Egypt they had been led into Canaan. From Canaan they had been expelled, as Adam from Eden. To Canaan they had been restored—but only to be oppressed again, and that in the land which the Lord their God had given them. Surely this was the sorest punishment of all. The promises remained. They were unrealized because the conditions were unfulfilled. To take refuge in apocalyptic dreams was a counsel of despair and unfaith. Remains the Law—as it is written through the prophet Micah: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"¹

¹ Mic. vi. 8. The saying is imitated by Jesus ben Sira (Ecclus.) and echoed by Jesus of Nazareth (Matt. xxiii. 23). It seems to have been adopted by some of the Pharisees as an adequate compendium of the law (*Maccoth*, 24 b).

The rulers and nobles had for the most part made a covenant with the powers of this world and were content to offer lip-service to their rightful Lord. God had withdrawn himself—if indeed he had ever interfered in human affairs. For all practical purposes man was the masterless charioteer of his own life¹. Such it would seem were principles of the Sadducean caste. They derived from the Hellenizers the art of plucking the roses and with them all the charm and joy of brave sublunary things. God's People were enslaved and enchained; but their great men could wear their fetters with a grace, and take their ease in a desecrated Zion. As for the mysteries of God, they knew them not; neither hoped they for the wages of righteousness, nor discerned a reward for blameless souls. Reasoning with themselves, but not aright, they said: "Our life is short and tedious, and in the death of a man there is no remedy: neither was there any man known to have returned from the grave. Come on, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are present. Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is of disservice to us²."

With these enemies of the Righteous we are not now concerned. But in this description of them we find one outstanding characteristic of the spirit of the age: the present is the child of the past and must correspond to it. There is a proverb "As is the mother, so is her daughter³." So the Sage who wrote in the name of Solomon described what was present to him in terms of the past which is recorded in Scripture. And we shall do well to follow his example. For at best we cannot have all the bare facts—*valeant quantum*—which represent the dry bones and fossilized remains of the age with which we are concerned. But we know something of the ways in which men thought and reasoned; and the Scriptures on which they fed their minds are extant. We set aside then the comparison of the sects of the Jews to the sects of Greek philosophers

¹ Ecclus.

² See Wisd. of Sol. ii.

³ Ezek. xvi. 44.

upon which Josephus relied and look rather for a prophecy which shall supply appropriate categories.

It is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah :—"From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, glory to the righteous. But I said, Leanness to me, leanness to me, woe is me! the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously. . . . And it shall come to pass that he who fleeth from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit, and he that cometh up out of the midst of the pit . . .¹."

What is this second *leanness*? Theodotion suggests that it is the secret which the fugitive sought in his flight.

Over against the Sadducees stood the Essenes, who fled into the wilderness. They shared the Hope of emancipation and consolation; but they were content to stand by and see what Almighty God would do. In the wilderness they might prepare and purify themselves against his visitation. So they might intercede then for the common folk, of whom they now despaired. They fled, while flight was possible, from the *leanness* to the *secret*. Though the curse of emaciation befall the people, it may be only a mystery, warning and promise in one, foreboding the Restoration of all things.

But the land was not peopled only by such as abused or forewent the good things that were present. The treacherous dealers were there, and the prophet who said, "My leanness, my leanness"—and fled. But with them were the Pharisees, who neither betrayed nor abandoned the people. In Palestine and from the uttermost parts of the earth there were voices to hear, singing, "Glory to the righteous," and again, "Hope to the righteous," since the glory tarried. Thus and thus was the prophecy of Isaiah fulfilled. The people were blind and foolish, babes in fine. But guides and instructors and teachers were at hand to be the light of them that were in darkness².

¹ Isa. xxiv. 16.

² See Rom. ii. 19 f. for these titles of the Rabbis.

Separating themselves from all impurity, the Pharisees went about among the masses, calling them to repentance and amendment of life, that they might be deserving of mercy. If Israel could but keep the commandments, God's promise was due to be fulfilled and the coming age should come.

It was a hard saying, almost a mockery. The way of virtue is rough; stumbling-blocks are many. Falls are inevitable—but not failure. The reward of a precept is a precept, and the reward of complete obedience is life. The Law of Moses contained many commandments framed for different stages in the history of the Nation. Considered as a whole, it was inconsistent with itself. And who could remember all its requirements—to say nothing of the indispensable obedience? It is written: "All things cannot be in a man, for the son of man is not immortal." But it is written again: "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." Without the forgiveness of God true piety was impossible. All we stumble much. Failing forgiveness, we must needs despair and proceed to add sin to sin, as being already banned. And the Law has provided means of atonement for all sins of ignorance. It is only the man who sins with a high hand that is without the pale. And this is the man who is conscious of all the commandments relevant to the action which he contemplates, and performs it with deliberate intention. An ordinary man may be distracted by natural affection or worldly cares from the service of Jehovah. For such there is and there was forgiveness, so he sin—if sin he must—in ignorance. He must be reproved and convicted; but if being convicted he show repentance, he will avoid wilful sin, for which there is no remedy.

This conviction and generally the direction of the people was the function of the Scribes of the Pharisees. No matter that for long no faithful prophet had appeared. The Sages and the Scribes were also God's Apostles. They had followed the prophets in their insistence upon the general principles

of the Law, and in their proper persons they had inherited and developed a system of case law, whose observance should preclude the transgression of the earlier Torah.

The men of the Great Synagogue said three things: "Be deliberate in judgment, and raise up many disciples, and make a fence to Torah¹." R. Agiba said: "Tradition is a fence to Torah." The point is developed by Philo with characteristic amplitude. As a practical moralist he accepted without hesitation the principle that humanly speaking this tradition is of more immediate importance than the Law itself, whose corollary and safeguard it is.

"Moreover also, this profitable precept was added to the code, 'Disturb not boundaries of the neighbour which they that were before thee set.' This law it would seem . . . does not only contemplate the removal of covetousness, but also the keeping of the ancient customs. For customs (*ἔθνη*) are unwritten laws, dogmas (decisions) of men of old not engraved on pillars and parchments, which moths destroy, but upon souls of those who share the same polity. For children ought to inherit from parents (apart from their property) the ancestral customs, in which they were educated and with which they have lived from their very cradles, and not to despise them because the tradition thereof is unwritten. For he that obeys the written laws does not deserve praise, being admonished by compulsion and fear of punishment; but he that abides by the unwritten laws, displaying a voluntary virtue, is worthy of eulogies²."

Now in respect of both these things, conditions of forgiveness and directions for right conduct, there was room for diversity of opinion. In the first case, the Temple and its priests were not always accessible; therefore some substitute was necessary. In the second case, different Rabbis took different views of the relative importance of

¹ *Pirge Aboth*, init.

² Philo, *De Iustitia* (*De Spec. Legg.*, iv), ii, p. 360 f. M (ed. Cohn and Wendland, vol. V, p. 242).

conflicting precepts. Moreover, the standard to which appeal lay was itself also, like the unwritten tradition, the product of a long life, and that the life of a nation; though the Scribes wished rather to reconcile than to recognize its inconsistencies. The result was that the pious were split up into different schools, and said—to take typical examples: “I am of Shammai and I of Hillel.” But Shammai and Hillel, John Baptist and Jesus, had a common aim—to secure obedience to the revealed will of God. So far and so long as the means were subordinated to that end, their disciples were of one accord together. After all, the means which they prescribed were, to all appearance, commandments of men. One said this and another that; but of all such “philosophical precepts and exhortations” Philo can say: “God asks of thee, O Mind, nothing heavy and various or hard (*δύσεργον*), but quite a simple thing and easy. It is to love him as benefactor, or else to fear him at least as ruler and lord, and to go by all roads that lead to acceptable worship, and to serve him, not as by the way, but with all the soul filled with the love of God, and to embrace his commandments, and to honour justice. . . . Which of these duties is difficult or troublesome?¹”

Such were the Pharisees, the champions of the Tradition and the real rulers of the people at this time. Ascetic and yet lenient in the exercise of their power, they were devoted to the Law. For the sake of the Hope, whose fulfilment depended upon the observance of God’s will, they were ready to co-operate with the advocates of any method of enforcing it. God used instruments in the past in order to accomplish his purpose for his people. Not all his servants were to the mind of the Pharisees. But to the other characteristics of the Stoics, which they shared, they added the habit of suspending their judgment, until some proof should be given whether such and such a thing were of God or not.

¹ Philo, ii. 257 M, *De Vict. Offer.* Compare Matt. xi. 28 f.

The narrative of the controversy, if such it can be called, which is permanently associated with Corban presents other features of interest, which are not without importance for the proper understanding of the situation. It is preserved by the first and the second of the four Evangelists, and the third recounts a similar incident which leads up to the same teaching about real as contrasted with external purity. This teaching does not enter into the scope of the present article: it is sufficient to note here that such insistence on the requisite significance of sacraments is common in the writings of the prophets and in the tradition of the elders.

The account given in the Gospel according to St. Matthew presents some rearrangement of the original, and, though clearly secondary, is worth some consideration.

"Then there come to Jesus from Jerusalem Pharisees and scribes, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they do not wash their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said to them, And why do ye transgress the commandment of God for your tradition? For God said, Honour the father and the mother; and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whoso say to the father or the mother, Gift be the profit thou mightest have had of me, he shall not honour the father of him¹. So ye have invalidated the word (law) of God for your tradition. Hypocrites², well did Isaiah³ prophesy concerning you, saying,

¹ The Sinaitic Syriac converts the formula from that of a vow into that of an oath:—"Corban if thou shalt be profited from me," i.e. "I swear by the Gift which is upon the altar that thou shalt not be profited from me." The Curetonian Syriac has "my offering thou shalt be profited from me," in apparent agreement with the old Latin version *donum meum proficiet tibi*. In this case we have to consider one who says and does not. Compare Jas. ii. 15 f.: "If a brother or sister be naked, and in lack of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Go in peace, be ye warmed and filled; and yet ye give them not the things needful to the body; what doth it profit?"

² Syr. Respecters of persons.

³ Isa. xxix. 13.

This people honoureth me with the lips,
 but their heart is far away from me.
 But vainly do they worship me,
 teaching doctrines commandments of men¹."

From the question propounded it appears that there were already disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem, with whom the Pharisees were ready to fraternize. The Gospels attributed to St. Luke and St. John bear out the inference; and even when the scandal of a crucified Messiah had alienated the many, James can say to Paul, "Thou seest, brother, how many myriads there are among the Jews of them that have believed and all are zealots for the law²." The statement is so incredible, that it must be fact and not fiction; and it is supported by Paul's reference to Christians who avoided persecution from the Jews by insisting upon the circumcision of their Gentile converts³.

The reply of Jesus deals with the transgression of the tradition generally without apparent reference to the particular case adduced. It is implied that the tradition of the elders is not of such paramount authority as the Pharisees maintained. Jesus speaks as a Sadducee among Pharisees; and suggests to them that, as transgressors of God's Law, they have no right to arraign the transgressors of mere human traditions. The Law does not support their requirement of ceremonial purity, and their conduct has been denounced by the prophet Isaiah. No defence or justification of the conduct alleged is offered by Jesus. For the original narrative we must go to Mark.

II. JEWISH SACRAMENTAL MEALS.

So far as it can be determined, the beginning of the original narrative would seem to have been as follows:—

"And there gather to him the Pharisees and some of the scribes, being come from Jerusalem, and having seen

¹ Matt. xv. 1-9.

² Acts xxi. 20.

³ Gal. vi. 12.

some of his disciples that with common hands they eat the loaves. And they ask him, Why walk not thy disciples after the tradition of the elders, but with common hands they eat the loaf?"

For the sake of Gentile readers two notes were added:—

(i) the explanation of *common*:—"that is unwashen."

(ii) a summary of that part of the tradition which concerns purifications:—"For the Pharisees and all the Jews except with the fist they wash the hands do not eat, holding the tradition of the elders. And from market, except they bathe, they do not eat. And other many things there are which they received to hold, washings of cups, and pitchers and pots¹."

The former gloss is adopted by Matthew in place of the original phrase. The latter appears to be based upon the parallel incident recorded by Luke², in which it is said: "Ye Pharisees cleanse the outside of *the cup and the dish*³."

This ruling of the Scribes, that one should wash one's hands *before* eating bread, has no certain warrant of Scripture; and even after the destruction of the Temple it was not always regarded as a matter of obligation. There is no need therefore to follow the later copyists, Western and Syrian, in assuming that the conduct of Jesus' disciples was censured or condemned⁴ by these inquirers.

It is true that God requires cleanness or innocency in his people; and that clean hands are the outward and visible sign which should accompany and betoken a pure heart. So, for example, the Psalmist puts *cleanness of*

¹ Οἱ γὰρ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ πάντες οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, ἐὰν μὴ πύργῃ νύφονται τὰς χεῖρας, οὐκ ἐσθίουσι, κρατοῦντες τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν πρεσβυτέρων· καὶ ἀπὸ ἀγορᾶς, ἐὰν μὴ βαπτίσωνται, οὐκ ἐσθίουσι· καὶ ἄλλα πολλά ἐστὶν ἃ παρέλαβον κρατεῖν, βαπτισμοὺς ποτηρίων καὶ ξεστῶν καὶ χαλκίων (Mark vii. 3 f.).

² Luke xi. 37-42.

³ Τοῦ ποτηρίου καὶ τοῦ πίνακος.

⁴ The "Received Text" adds ἐμέμφαντο, Codex Bezae κατέγνωσαν at the end of Mark vii. 2.

hands as the equivalent of *righteousness*, which is obedience to all the judgments and statutes of the Lord.

"Jehovah rewards me according to my righteousness ;

"According to the cleanness of my hands returns to me.

"Because I have kept the ways of Jehovah,

"And have not acted wickedly (in departing) from my God¹."

But the actual ablution is only required of priests, when they approach the altar, and of persons who are about to partake of a sacrificial meal. So it is written: "And Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and feet, when they went into the tent of meeting, and when they came near the altar²"; and again: "Samuel said to the elders of Bethlehem . . . Sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice³."

Special precepts⁴ might be found, which convey the general principle to those who can pierce beneath the surface; but the excessive repetition of rites and ceremonies is apt to lead to mere formalism and a neglect of their significance. The Rabbis and the Sages, therefore, did not regard this practice as a universal duty, incumbent upon all at this time, but left it as a matter which each man should decide for himself.

It is said in the treatise entitled *Blessings*: "We have learned that to wash oneself before meals is optional, but to do so after meals is obligatory: to wash oneself before meals is an interruption, but not so after meals. What does this interruption mean? According to R. Jacob ben Aha, it means that one should wash twice. R. Samuel ben Isaac asked: 'Why do they insist so strongly upon the accomplishment of an action which has just been stated to be optional?' 'It is of importance,' says R. Jacob ben Idi, 'for it happened once that pork was given to a man to eat as not seeing him wash himself

¹ Ps. xviii. 21 f. Compare Ps. xxiv. 4, where Briggs (*I. C. C.*, ad loc.) suspects interpolation of *hands*, and Job ix. 30; xvii. 9.

² Exod. xl. 31 f.

³ 1 Sam. xvi. 8.

⁴ e.g. Lev. xv. 11.

before the meals. . . . Others say that three persons died as a consequence of this negligence¹."

The story of the Jew who omitted to wash his hands before eating, and was therefore given pork to eat, is told more fully in the *Bemidbar Rabba*². It seems legitimate to infer from it that the practice arose in the time of the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes ; and that to wash one's hands and to repeat the appropriate blessing before a meal had come to be the characteristic mark of a devout Jew.

But in view of the admitted discrepancy of rulings on this point of the Halacha, the question is rather why did the Pharisees or some of the Scribes or both incline to insist upon it as a duty. Apparently they had witnessed the extraordinary sanctity of the disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem, and by their present errand recognized the authority of the Prophet of Nazareth. That the Law was inconsistent with itself they knew. The prophets, the sages, and the scribes in turn had repealed its provisions. A teacher whom some regarded as a faithful prophet was within his rights, if he had really repealed this prescription of the Tradition. If the ritual act of hand-washing had lost its significance and connotation of inward purity, it were better abolished ; as another prophet had said, "Rend your hearts, and not your garments."

These Pharisees and these Scribes do not justify the custom to which they adhered. Its purpose and origin were presumably matter of common knowledge. It was the duty of the father and the teacher to explain why such and such rites were observed in Israel. But now the student is left without instruction to rediscover the cause of the practice for himself.

From the passages of Scripture already cited, it would appear that the duty was binding only upon such as were

¹ Jerusalem Talmud *Berakhoth*, VIII, Gemara.

² § xx : on Numbers xxiv. 3, *He took up his parable and said*. "Halacha, He that hath eaten without washing his hands, of what does he become guilty? Our Rabbis have taught :—the washing of the hands before the meal is optional, but after the meal it is a duty."

in some respect of a priestly character, and upon them and others at such times as they were preparing for a sacrificial meal.

Pharisees and Nazarenes—at any rate those who resided at Jerusalem—naturally spent their lives in the service of Jehovah. So far they shared the priestly function and character, and could not free themselves from the requirements of the current priestly code. If then the meal, to which reference is made, were in any sort sacrificial, those who partook of it must first wash their hands. Jesus, the Pharisees would assume, had presumably given a dispensation to his disciples in respect of this custom as in that of fasting.

It is unnecessary to cite later conceptions, whether Jewish or Christian, of the table as an altar and the ordinary meal as a sacrament¹. It would be easy to reply that this evidence was not valid for the time, when the temple of Jerusalem was standing. None the less it must be urged that there were Jews in foreign parts and outside the Holy City who could not always go up to the central sanctuary when they wished to enter the presence of God. The benediction of the meal required preparation of heart, if not always of hand, at all times. And if God provided the food, he was in some sort the giver of the feast and was recognized as present there, if only in the person of a hypothetical priest.

Apart from such general considerations, there is definite evidence that ordinary meals, or those to which guests were invited, were regarded as equivalent to sacrificial meals. It is written in the Law: "And this shall be the right of the priests from the people, from them that sacrifice the sacrifice, whether ox or sheep; he shall give to the priest the shoulder, the two cheeks, and the maw²."

¹ Mr. Abrahams adds the note, "That the table became so regarded in later Judaism is undeniable, and some Jewish customs still prevalent are based on the idea that the meal—especially the Sabbath meal—is a sacrifice and a sacrament."

² Deut. xviii. 3.

The language points unmistakably to a sacrificial meal; but Philo and Josephus agree with the Rabbis in extending the statute, and therefore the formula *sacrifice the sacrifice*, to meals which had no specifically religious purpose. Thus Philo says, "From those things which are sacrificed (slaughtered) away from the altar for the sake of flesh-eating, three things are enjoined to be given to the priest, arm, cheek, and what is called the maw¹."

And again: "Moses teaches by examples. He begins by admonishing and chastening the appetite of the belly; for he assumed that men would never give the rein to the other lusts or appetites, but would restrain them because the eldest and chief of them all had learned to obey the laws of temperance. . . . So he bridled the desire both of eating and of drinking, by precepts which are conducive to self-control and to philanthropy, and, the greatest of all, to piety. . . . He enjoins that no one taste anything at all before he separate² the firstfruits³."

From this it follows that any and every meal must be shared with God himself in the person of his priests, and thus becomes a means of communion between God and his worshippers, which is independent of the Temple and the Temple-worship. When the Temple was destroyed, all surviving rites and ceremonies inevitably rose in importance, and were enforced as equivalent substitutes for the system of sacrifices, which necessarily ceased. Hence the pious custom practised by the righteous became the duty of every Jew who deserved the name, as in the days of the persecution. Bread is a term wide enough to cover all food. It is a Rabbinic commonplace that all eating of bread is to be understood of the study of Torah. Gatherings are properly for the sake of feasting⁴. The food is that which God created for men to partake of with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by means of God's word and supplication⁵.

¹ ii, p. 235 M.

² διακρίναι.

³ ii, p. 351 M.

⁴ συνάγειν means elsewhere, if not in Mark, i. c., to entertain.

⁵ 1 Tim. iv. 4.

So in his prison the Rabbi Aqiba will go thirsty, that he may sanctify himself for his scanty meal. So the Christians of Corinth must realize that they gather together to eat the feast of the Lord God, and must conduct accordingly, for fear of what penalties they may incur if they neglect the requisite *discrimination* of the firstfruits¹.

It is written in the Law: "Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy²." Two purifications are required. It is a duty to wash one's hands before and after a meal. For the meal is the substitute for the sacrifice of the Peace Offering, which is also the sacrifice of salvation³. And it is written again: "This is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings. . . . If he offer it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer with the sacrifice of thanksgiving unleavened cakes . . . and beside the cakes . . . leavened bread . . . but the soul that eateth of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings, that pertain unto the Lord, having his uncleanness upon him, even that soul shall be cut off from his people⁴." On the other hand, if the meal have no sacred character, the unclean and the clean may eat thereof⁵; thus there was no need for the washing of hands, benediction, or discrimination.

Mark's phrases, *the loaves* and *the loaf* or *the bread*⁶ perhaps bewray his consciousness that the celebration of the Holy Communion was based upon an extant practice of the Pharisees. But whether he knew it or not, it seems a plausible conclusion, from the evidence available, that in the Assembly of the home for the meal—whether all daily meals or one of them, or one meal in each week—the Pharisees had found something to supplement the Assembly of the House of Assembly as an adequate alternative to the Temple of Jerusalem.

¹ 1 Cor. xi. 20-30.

² Lev. xx. 7.

³ LXX, τῆς θυσίας τοῦ σωτηρίου.

⁴ Lev. vii. 11 ff.

⁵ Deut. xii. 15, 22.

⁶ τοὺς ἄρτους (Mark vii. 2), τὸν ἄρτον (Mark vii. 5).

III. THE LAW OF GOD AND THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.

"Jesus saith to them, Well did Isaiah prophesy of you (as it is written), This people with the lips honoureth me, but the heart of them is far away from me; but in vain they worship me, teaching teachings commandments of men. [Leaving the commandment of God, ye retain the tradition of men¹.]"

The requirement that the hands should be washed as a religious duty before any or any particular meal involves a multiplication of observances and a potential supersession of the worship at Jerusalem. Similar conditions and causes had produced similar results at an earlier time in the history of Israel. With bitter irony the prophet Amos had said to those who forsook and belittled the central sanctuary: "Come to Bethel and transgress, to Gilgal and multiply transgressions; and bring your sacrifices every morning and your tithes every three days, and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings and publish them; for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord God²."

Ceremonies and acts of ritual have no value in themselves. To multiply them beyond what is written is to transgress; for it implies that their performance is in itself meritorious. But men need ritual for their souls'

¹ Mark vii. 6-8, Westcott and Hort edit the text thus: ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Καλῶς ἐπροφήτευσεν Ἡσαίας περὶ ὑμῶν τῶν ὑποκριτῶν, ὡς γέγραπται ὅτι

Οὗτος ὁ λαὸς τοῖς χεῖλεσίν με τιμᾷ,

ἡ δὲ καρδία αὐτῶν πόρρω ἀπέχει ἀπ' ἐμοῦ·

μάτην δὲ σέβονται με,

διδάσκοντες διδασκαλίας ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων·

ἀφέντες τὴν ἐντολὴν τοῦ θεοῦ κρατεῖτε τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων. But the Sinaitic Syriac omits τῶν ὑποκριτῶν (only here in St. Mark), which Christian copyists would be only too ready to insert. Codex Bezae omits ὡς γέγραπται ὅτι, which is at any rate obviously parenthetical: compare its addition of *and said* which is supported by the Sinaitic Syriac.

² Amos iv. 46.

sake. The service of the Synagogue could not wholly replace the worship of the Temple. The ministry of the word, to adopt phrases which belong to the Nazarene sect of Judaism, must be supplemented by the ministry of tables, if God is to be accessible otherwhen than on Sabbath and elsewhere than in Synagogue. Even, perhaps particularly, those who could find their way to the Temple at more than the necessary seasons feel the need of additional means of grace. So the men who succeeded Moses and the prophets provided the props and satisfactions of piety, which were lacking, for men's sake. True, such things were the teaching of men, but what else is Torah itself? The only difference is that the authors of the Law were men who had acquired sanctity because they lived so long ago. Now—in the first century of the current era—as then, it was true that *mentem mortalia tangunt*. The guides of the people inspired directly or indirectly endeavour to cope with human needs.

The text of this prophecy of Isaiah is that of the Septuagint¹, whose language is faithfully reproduced, and not that of the Masoretic Hebrew². The original triplet has been adapted—probably not now for the first time—for the purposes of separate quotation. In particular the prefatory formula *the Lord said* seems to be disregarded.

The Scripture was indeed a text, to which both Pharisee and Sadducee might well appeal in their controversies about the validity of the Oral Tradition. If such it be—a proof-text and no more—the extent to which its original context is contemplated by Jesus must remain a doubtful question. It can hardly be excluded absolutely. Jesus might wish to correct erroneous conclusions derived from it in its

¹ Καὶ εἶπεν Κύριος Ἐγγίξει μοι ὁ λαὸς οὗτος ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τοῖς χεῖρεσιν αὐτῶν τιμῶσίν με, ἡ δὲ καρδία αὐτῶν πόρρω ἀπέχει ἀπ' ἐμοῦ· μάτην δὲ σέβονται με διδάσκοντες ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων καὶ διδασκαλίας.

² Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draws near | with its mouth and with its lips they honour me and its heart it removed from me | and their fear of me is a commandment of men which hath been taught.

naked form. And possibly he actually adduced more of the preface or the sequel, which his reporters omitted as irrelevant or superfluous. At least he may have advised the Scribes to read the whole section for their guidance.

The preface speaks of a time when men shall be drunken, not with wine, but with a spirit of stupor¹. It is a time when "All vision is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver unto one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee, and he saith, I cannot, for it is sealed²." It is a time when "all they that watch for iniquity are cut off, that make a man an offender by a word . . . and turn aside the just with a thing of nought³."

It is not merely the case that the actual proof-text is an obvious weapon to use. Its original context squares with the situation as Paul conceived it, and Jesus before him⁴.

That the teachers of the people were dependent upon the written word of God for their enlightenment was no fault of their own. They had found as yet no faithful prophet and were shut up to the painful task of interpretation of Scripture. Perforce they taught "every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord⁵." Not yet was the promise of the new covenant fulfilled. Only in the coming age would God write his law in the heart of his children, so that all should know him from the least of them unto the greatest of them.

The closing verse of this first section of Jesus' reply is omitted by the Sinaitic Syriac version and also by Matthew. It appears to be a doublet of the opening of the second section and is repeated in another form at its close. The accretion may be due to different translations of the original saying, or more probably to the collocation of correspondent Scriptures which constitutes primitive exegesis. The disciples of Jesus believed the Scripture

¹ Compare Rom. xi. 8.

² Isa. xxix. 11.

³ Isa. xxix. 20 f.

⁴ Rom. xi. 8; 1 Cor. i. 19; compare John xii. 40.

⁵ Jer. xxxi. (xxxviii) 31 ff.

and the word which Jesus said¹: they understood the sayings when they had correlated them to the oracles of the earlier prophets.

In consequence of this interpolation the usual Marcan and Talmudic formula *and he was saying* has been inserted. The Imperfect tense denotes that in the Evangelist's opinion the chief point of the incident is not yet reached. The vivid Present is used only of the original question² and of the private instruction of the disciples³.

The original saying in its original form would seem to be—

"Ye leave the commandment of God to establish your tradition⁴."

It is the link between Isaiah's prophecy and the appeal to a current ruling of some scribes. The *tradition* is "the commandments of men," to which Isaiah referred. The scribes *leave* the commandment of God, by refusing to give their disciples *leave* to obey it⁵. This paronomasia has become obscured in the Greek text, which is now received by all; but may be restored with the help of the preceding doublet and the Sinaitic Syriac.

The substitution of *ye annul* (ἀθετεῖτε) for *ye leave* (ἀφίετε) might be the result of scribal error: ι and ει are practically indistinguishable, and φ is easily confused with θ. But a prophecy of Ezekiel, the titular Son of Man, offers a more plausible explanation. It is written: "And there came a word of Jehovah unto me, saying, Son of man, say unto her, Thou art a land which is not cleansed . . . and *her priests have annulled my law*⁶, and have profaned my holy things: between holy and profane they did not distinguish, neither have they showed difference between unclean and clean⁷."

¹ John ii. 22.

² Mark vii. 5.

³ Mark vii. 18.

⁴ Ἀφίετε τὴν ἐντολὴν τοῦ θεοῦ ἵνα τὴν παράδοσιν ὑμῶν στήσητε.

⁵ Mark vii. 8 ἀφέντες τὴν ἐντολὴν τοῦ θεοῦ κρατεῖτε τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων (from ἀνθρώπων of Isa., l. c.).

⁶ Ezek. xxii. 23 ff.

⁷ LXX, καὶ οἱ ἱερεῖς ἡθέτησαν τὸν νόμον μου.

This prophecy was not adduced by Jesus; for on a superficial view it was absolutely inappropriate. The distinction between clean and unclean had now been carried to an excess, if excess be possible. The Sabbaths of God were observed with the utmost exactitude. The very name of God was preserved from profanation by all the devices which human ingenuity could suggest. Men had been found by God and for God, who should fence a fence and stand in the gap before God for the land¹. The fence maker was surely the Rabbi, as the Greek translator implies by his rendering:—"a man of right behaviour and standing before the Lord completely in the crisis of the land, that he destroy it not utterly"².

It is noteworthy that neither Jesus nor even the subterranean interpreter of his Saying sees fit to apply to the scribes as yet the denunciation of their order by Jeremiah. At the end when the keepers of the vineyard determined to slay him who claimed to be the heir, a parable is spoken and a parable is performed, in which traces of this prophecy may be found. God's vineyard is to be taken from the rulers of Israel; and the fig-tree, that has nothing but leaves, is blighted. As it is written: "How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us? Vain hath become the false pen of the scribes. The sages are shamed . . . because they repudiated the law of the Lord. . . . Therefore I will give . . . their fields to the heirs, and they shall gather their fruits, saith the Lord. . . . *There are no figs on the fig-trees, and the leaves have fallen off*"³.

Here, however, there is no denunciation; only a statement of fact. Tradition conflicts with the Law. What of that? In the exercise of the authority committed to them, the Scribes, like Jesus himself, were ready to repeal what

¹ See Ezek. xxii. 26, 30.

² Ezek. xxii. 30, LXX, ἄνδρα ἀναστρεφόμενον ὁρθῶς καὶ ἐστῶτα πρὸ προσώπου μου ὁλοσχερῶς ἐν καιρῷ τῆς γῆς τοῦ μὴ εἰς τέλος ἐξαλεῖψαι αὐτήν.

³ Jer. viii. 8 ff., LXX. The omission of 10 b-12 is perhaps an example of the Expurgation with which Justin taxes Trypho.

was said to them of old. Had not the Psalmist set aside the whole system of sacrifices¹? Had not Jeremiah foreseen a new Covenant²?

If Moses and Aaron were to be superseded, it was a small thing that *as a punishment* a man should be debarred from the performance and therein from the reward of "the first commandment with promise." For this saying is connected with what follows rather than with what precedes. "Upon the seat of Moses," Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "the Scribes and the Pharisees have sat them down. All things therefore whatsoever they say to you, do and observe³."

And in reference to the minutiae of the Tradition, which seem to us the meticulous requirements of a wanton pedantry, he said again, The Scribes tithe mint and anise and cummin. Nothing is so small that their Law neglects it. In their attention to trifles they tend to lose sight of the great essential principles involved. They are right to do as they do, but not to forsake justice, mercy, and faith⁴.

So Philo, his contemporary, who strove *more suo* to proclaim the inward significance of the Law and to fulfil it, insists that apprehension of the spirit does not warrant neglect of the letter. Like the good Christian, the good Jew must provide things honest in the sight of all men—as the Pharisees did. There is a virtue in a consensus of opinion and some truth in the proverb, *Vox populi vox Dei*. Not for nought do the Pharisees of any religion—hypocrites though they may be—perform their rites and ceremonies so as to be seen by men for an example. The fourth gift promised to Abraham (Gen. xii. 2) is greatness of name. . . . He who both is and appears good is truly happy and really great of name. One should provide for fair fame (*προνοητέον* . . . *ἐνφημίᾳ*) as for a great thing and

¹ Ps. xv. 6-8; see Epistle to the Hebrews, x. 5-9.

² Jer. xxxi. 31-4; see Heb. viii. 7-13.

³ Matt. xxiii. 1-3.

⁴ Matt. xxiii. 23.

beneficial to the life in (*lit.* with) the body. It comes to almost all who with joyful contentment (σὺν ἀσμενισμῷ κινουῦσι) disturb none of the existing ordinances, but keep the ancestral polity carefully. For there are some who, regarding the literal laws as symbols of spiritual things, have elaborated some overmuch while they lightly slighted others. Such I should blame for their levity. For they ought to care for both the more exact search for invisible things and also for blameless husbandry of the manifest. But now, as in a desert, they live alone by themselves or have become bodiless souls knowing neither city, nor village, nor home, nor, in a word, any company of men at all; they peer over what is apparent to the many, and seek truth naked as it is in itself. But the sacred word teaches them to have regard for a good reputation and not to relax (λύειν) any of the things contained in the customs which divine (θεσπέσιοι) and greater men than those of our time decreed.

The Sabbath may be a lesson of teaching about the power belonging to the uncreated and of rest from labour and inactivity of the creature. But let us not therefore loose the legislation concerned with it as to light a fire, or till the ground, or carry burdens, or lay accusations, or go to law, or demand back deposits, or exact loans, or do the other things which are commanded on non-feast days.

Nor yet because the feast is a symbol of the soul's gladness and of thanksgiving to God should we renounce the assemblies at the seasons of the year.

Nor yet because circumcision signifies the excision of pleasure and all passions, and the destruction of impious opinion wherein the mind supposed itself competent to beget of itself, may we destroy the law laid down for circumcision. Since we shall neglect the ritual of the sanctuary and ten thousand other things if we take heed only to that which is indicated by means of allegories.

We must regard the literal sense as like a body and the others like soul. . . . If we keep the one, the other, of which

the first is symbol, will be more clearly recognized, and forbye we shall escape censure and accusation from the many.

Seest thou not that even to Abraham the sage it saith that both great goods and small accue. . . . The former correspond to the laws of nature, the latter to made laws¹. The self-taught Isaac prays for the lover of wisdom that he may receive both spiritual and material good things² (Gen. xxvii. 28).

IV. CORBAN.

“And he was saying to them, Ye do well that ye leave the commandment of God, that ye may establish your tradition³. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, He that curseth father or mother let him surely die: but ye say, If a man say to the father or the mother, Corban be the profit thou mightest have had of me—no longer do ye let him leave to do anything to the father or the mother [making of none effect the word of God by the tradition which ye delivered; and many such-like things ye do]⁴.”

The preface has already been discussed. It remains here to notice that the law infringed is described as *the commandment of God* or *the word of God*, although it is cited with the formula *Moses said*. His description agrees with ancient and modern usage. It is written, *God spake these words and said*. And Philo speaks of the Ten Oracles as “those which God Himself pronounced without prophet or interpreter⁵.”

¹ *De migr. Abr.* (ed. Cohn and Wendland, vol. II, §§ 86–94).

² *Ibid.*, § 101 (ed. Cohn and Wendland, vol. II, p. 288), p. 452 M.

³ *Καλῶς* is generally regarded as bitterly ironical (so 2 Cor. xi. 4). The rendering given is that of the Sinaitic Syriac: compare Jer. i. 12 יִשְׁבַּח ה' וְיִשְׁמְרֵהוּ לְעַד; LXX, *καλῶς ἐώρακας*.

⁴ Mark vii. 10–13.

⁵ *De Spec. Legg.*, iii, § 7.

The conclusion is not necessarily a mere doublet of the preface like its predecessor. The Scribes by their ruling did actually invalidate the law in question so as to nullify the promise which it contained¹.

So at long last we reach the appeal to the practice of Corban. At the outset it must be noticed that Jesus breaks off suddenly in his account of the action which is taken by the persons addressed in the specified circumstances. Such abruptness—an anacoluthon—as the grammarians call it—is commonly the sign of intense emotion. “Ye say . . .” What do they say? We are not told—only that it comes to this: “Ye no longer permit him to do anything to father or mother.”

What then is the feeling which arrests and interrupts the utterance? The common answer seems to be indignation such as any pious Jew would feel at the neglect of the honour due to parents. But if any one inclines to accept this view let him hear the words of Jesus: “He said to another, Follow me. But he said, Permit me first to bury my father. He said to him, Let the dead bury their dead, but do thou proclaim the kingdom of God. Moreover another said, I will follow thee, Lord, but first permit me to take leave of my household. Jesus said to him, No one who has put his hand to the plough and looks behind is fit for the kingdom of God².”

And again, “When multitudes were going with him he turned and said to them, He that cometh unto me and hateth not father and mother and brothers and sisters and wife and sons, my disciple he cannot be³.”

This renunciation is required by the Law of the High Priest and the Nazirite. He must so far as possible be removed from human infirmity. Like the fugitive Levite he must renounce his kindred. A priest may defile him-

¹ Cf. Gal. iii. 17 *διαθήκην προκεκυρωμένην ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ . . . νόμος οὐκ ἀκυροῖ εἰς τὸ καταργῆσαι τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν.*

² Luke ix. 59 ff.

³ Luke xiv. 25 f. Matthew (x. 37) mitigates the severity of the demand.

self for his mother, father, son, daughter, brother, and virgin sister; but not the high priest¹.

So Philo²: "The high priest he withdrew from all mourning. And reasonably enough. For the services of the other priests one can perform in place of another, so that even if some are mourning none of the customary rites is omitted. But the services of the high priest none is permitted to do. For which cause he must remain always undefiled without touching a dead body, in order that he may be ready at the fitting seasons and perform without let or hindrance the prayers and sacrifices on behalf of the world.

"And apart from this, being allotted to God, and having become the leader of the holy order, he ought to be alienated from all created things. He must not be so overcome by affection for parents, or children, or brethren, as to postpone any of the holy rites, which were better done immediately. The commandments of the law design that he become superior to pity, and live always without grief. For the law wishes him to partake of a greater nature that belongs to man as he approaches nearer to the divine nature, being, if one must say the truth, midway between both, that through this sort of intermediary men may appease God, and God using a kind of underling may extend and supply his graces to mankind."

Jesus then required of his disciples that they should devote their lives absolutely to the service of God. This sacrifice of human affections he had made himself.

The first-born son of his mother, he belonged as such to God. "They brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, *Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to*

¹ Lev. xxi: N.B. omission of *wife*. Compare Deut. xxxiii. 9 (father, mother, brethren, children), and Matt. x. 37 (father, mother, son, daughter), with Luke xiv. 26 (father, mother, *wife*, children, brethren, and sisters). Compare 1 Cor. vii. 32 ff.

² *De Monarchia*, ii. 12 (p. 230 M).

the Lord) and to offer sacrifice, according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, *a pair of doves or two young pigeons*¹." And when the parents brought in the child Jesus that they might do according to the custom of the Law, Symeon, a just and pious man, who was expecting the consolation of Israel, took him in his arms, and under the influence of the Holy Spirit acclaimed him as Messiah². The story suggests unmistakably that this child could not be redeemed by any sacrifice. Nevertheless, it is said that "they accomplished all that was according to the law of the Lord"³. This general statement may be held to override the impression produced by the description of their errand and of the intervention of Symeon and Hanna. Even so the next and final tradition preserved in Luke's Infancy Gospel proves that the child held himself to be Corban.

"And his parents went every year to Jerusalem at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up after the custom of the feast; and when they had fulfilled the days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and his parents knew it not; but supposing him to be in the company, they went a day's journey; and they sought for him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance: and when they found him not, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking for him. And it came to pass, after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions: and all that heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when they saw him, they were astonished: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be in my Father's house?"

¹ Luke ii. 23 f.

² Luke ii. 25 ff.

³ Luke ii. 39.

Different opinions may be held with regard to the value of these narratives. If their historicity is denied, one might suggest that fiction must be more obviously in keeping with the supposed character of its hero than fact, which is apt to be irrelevant and inconvenient. In any case, Jesus repudiated his mother and his brethren at a later time, and commanded his disciples to obey the Scribes' directions.

The inference is irresistible. For his life or for a term of years Jesus of Nazareth had vowed himself to the service of the Kingdom of Heaven. Circumstances had changed; say, the husband of his mother died. He had consulted—once more—with the doctors of Jerusalem, if haply he might be released from the vow. He had no clearness in the matter, nor had they. Scripture all but shouts outright that vows must be performed. Had he said to his mother, "Corban be the good thou mightest have had of me"? So he must say at Cana of Galilee, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? My time is not yet come¹." If his vow was only for a term of years, did he set his face to go up to Jerusalem at the last, because the time had come that he should pay his vow? Certainly death pays all debts; and, dying, Jesus gave his mother a son in place of himself who was found and lost at once.

Whether this be a valid explanation of the intense feeling which is evident in the broken saying of Jesus or not, at least the conjecture suggests one case, in which the formula of interdiction of advantage would be pronounced by a son to his parent or parents. If a man believed himself to be a prophet of God, whether sanctified from the womb, like Elijah, or called later to the office, like Elisha, he must needs say farewell of his father and mother. If for any reason, however apparently good, he desired to be absolved from the vow of service to God, the Sages or Scribes, to whom he must appeal in so weighty a case, had to choose between their human instincts and the dictates of the Law, between the honour of God and the honour of

¹ John ii. 4.

parents. The problem rarely occurred, but it was impressive and difficult enough to become an academic question for the schools. And it is hard to justify any other answer than that given by the Scribes to whom Jesus refers. True, they cannot have been Pharisees of the ordinary type; for the Pharisees were notorious for their leniency. Perhaps they were Scribes of the Sadducees, or shared the unswerving and unflinching devotion to the honour of God which characterized the school of Shammai. At any rate, if a man (as Josephus says) named himself Corban he could not be released from his vow before the expiration of the term, if any term were specified. It is written in the Law, "When thou shalt vow a vow unto Jehovah thy God thou shalt not delay to pay it; for Jehovah thy God will surely require it of thee, and it will be sin in thee¹." And the Preacher says, "It is good that thou make no vow, rather than that thou shouldest vow and pay not. Give not thy mouth to make thy flesh to sin, and say not before the messenger of God, It was an error²."

It is said in the Mishna of the treatise *Chagigah*³ that "the rules concerning the dissolving of vows fly about in the air and there is nothing upon which they can rest." But in the *Gemara* a Baraita is appended which gives some passages of Scripture to which various Rabbis appealed in support of their various decisions. "Rabbi Eliezer says they have something upon which they may rest, for it is said 'when he shall separate,' 'when he shall separate' twice. One separation has to do with binding and one separation with dissolving." This interpretation of the repeated phrase is disallowed by R. Tarphon on the ground that "the state of the Nazirite is not given except on condition of separation⁴."

¹ Deut. xxiii. 21-23; compare Num. xxx.

² Eccles. v. 4-6.

³ Streane's translation, p. 47.

⁴ Ibid., p. 48. See Lev. xxvii. 2; Num. vi. 2. The precise meaning of the expression is uncertain. Gray renders: When any man or woman shall discharge a vow, with the note, that this, to discharge or accomplish

The fact is that the justification of the dissolution or remission of a vow taxed the ingenuity of the Rabbis to the utmost. As men they felt that it was necessary in certain circumstances. As God's ministers they felt that even so it was contrary to the honour of God. The point at issue is the sanctity of the vow. Herein Scripture conflicted with Scripture, and only God, some thought with Philo, could resolve the controversy. "There are some who say that they will not have so-and-so or so-and-so to share board or roof with them, or again that they will not confer any benefit upon so-and-so or receive anything from him till death. And sometimes even after the death they are still irreconcilable, refusing in will even to the dead bodies the performance of the customary offices. Such I would counsel to conciliate the Deity with prayers and sacrifices that they may win some treatment of the soul-sicknesses, *which no man is competent to heal*¹."

For Philo vows are of the nature of a sacrament which is vitiated by any change of purpose in the mind of the person who makes the vow. So commenting on the Scripture, "And God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it," he says:—

"The characters formed according to the seventh and truly divine light God blesses and straightway declares holy. For he that deserves blessing (ὁ εὐλόγιστος) and he that is holy are near akin to each other. Therefore of him that vowed the great vow it saith, that if a sudden turning swoop down and defile the mind no longer shall he be holy²."

And again, commenting on the word *found* in the passage "Noah found grace before the Lord God," he distinguishes

a vow, is a sense which satisfies all passages, though how it was acquired is not clear. Numbers *I. C. C.*, pp. 61 and 64.

¹ Philo, ii, 273 M.

² p. 46 M. The reference is to Num. vi. 9, "And if any man die very suddenly beside him and he defile the head of his separation"; but Philo substitutes his spiritual interpretation for the actual letter.

between *finding* (εὑρεσις) and *recovery* (ἀνεύρεσις), and says:—

“Of the former the regulations of the great vow are the clearest example. A vow is a request for good things from God; but the great vow is to reckon God in himself alone as the cause of good things apart from the co-operation of any secondary cause which appears to bestow any advantage—such as the soil as fertile, the rains as giving increase to seeds and plants, the air as capable of nourishing them, agriculture as cause of crops, or physic as cause of health, or marriage as cause of birth of children. For all these secondary causes by God’s power admit of changes and turnings, so that often they produce abnormal and extraordinary results. Him therefore Moses pronounces holy who nourisheth the hair of his head, meaning the man who increases the summary shoots of virtue’s decisions in his mind, and in a manner wears his hair long and prides himself thereon. But sometimes he flings them off when a whirlwind, so to say, swoops down upon the soul, and snatches away all its noble thoughts. Now this whirlwind is a certain unconscious turning, which suddenly pollutes the mind and is called death. Nevertheless he puts it away in its turn, and being cleansed takes up and remembers what he had forgotten, and finds what he cast away. . . .¹”

But Philo describes those who take this vow as “having become by excess of misanthropy unsociable and aloof in nature”; and in his treatise on Right-swearing he clearly deprecates the practice. In this he agrees with R. Aqiba, who summed the sense of Scripture in two sayings:—“Vows are a fence to purity²,” and “Be not rash in vows lest thou violate oaths³.” The Jews of Alexandria, like the Jews of Galilee, were apparently given to much swearing; and the Rabbis were concerned to eradicate this fault. Even the solemn formula of the Nazirite vow

¹ p. 285 M (ed. Cohn and Wendland, vol. II, p. 75).

² Bacher, *Ag. Pal. Tann.*, i. 276.

³ Bacher, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

had become a mere oath uttered vainly and with no righteous purpose. In such circumstances the refusal of absolution, carrying with it exclusion from the promise of life, was the proper penalty. Moses said, "He that curseth or dishonoureth father or mother must die." Jesus himself cited the Scripture, and did not plead for any mitigation of the sentence.

So Philo: "Him that sweareth vainly in an unjust cause, God, who is gracious in nature, will never free from guilt—for such an one is *unclean and foul*—though he escape punishment from men. But he will never go scot-free, for there are thousands of watchers, zealots for the Lord, exact guardians of the ancestral customs."

Here then is a clue to the connexion of Jesus' reply with the original question. His disciples are ceremonially unclean; and so are the disciples of the Pharisees. "THESE EAT AND THOSE SWEAR WITH UNWASHEN HANDS," as the proverb has it. "Some have such easiness in the matter of swearing that passing by all created things they dare to run up in their speech to the maker and father of the universe, without first examining places if they be profane or sacred, times if they be suitable, themselves if they be clean in body or soul, matters if they be important, or needs if they be urgent. No, as the saying goes, *with unwashen hands*¹, confounding everything, they swear as if it were necessary, since nature provided them with a tongue, to use it loosed and unbridled for illegitimate ends²."

The multiplication of religious observances is a danger. Familiarity may breed contempt in the case of meals as in the case of vows. The Scribes were witnesses to the danger which existed in respect of the latter. The measures which they adopted accord with the saying of Jesus,

¹ Compare Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 724-6:

μηδέ ποτ' ἐξ ἧοὺς Διὶ λείβεμεν αἶθοπα οἶνον
 χερσὶν ἀνίπτουσιν μηδ' ἄλλοις ἀθανάτοισιν
 οὐ γὰρ τοίγε κλύουσιν ἀποπτύουσι δέ τ' ἀράς,

² Περὶ εὐορκίας ii.

“But I say to you”—whatever more lenient teachers may say—“every idle word which men shall speak, they shall give account concerning it in the day of judgment. For out of thy words thou shalt be justified and out of thy words thou shalt be condemned¹.”

Jesus will have nothing to do with the charitable expedients devised by the Pharisees for the relief of their disciples:—“Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor. Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that hath sanctified the gold? And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gift that is upon it, he is a debtor. Ye blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? He therefore that sweareth by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. And he that sweareth by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that sweareth by the heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon².”

To refrain altogether from swearing is the only safe course:—“Again, ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: but I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by the heaven, for it is the throne of God; nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, for thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your speech be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: and whatsoever is more than these is of the evil one³.”

It remains to examine briefly the details of this description of the conflict between the ancient and the modern lawgivers.

¹ Matt. xii. 36 f.

² Matt. xxiii. 16–22.

³ Matt. vi. 33–37.

The former of the two sayings of Moses is the text by which the Rabbis of the school of Eliezer would seek to open the way for the dissolution of the vow. "Were you," they would say to the penitent delinquent, "conscious of this chief commandment, when you made the vow from which you seek release?" It is indeed incredible that a Jew should have been able to forget the honour of parents. But anger, as Philo says, is a despotic mistress; and the Pharisees were indulgent to human infirmity.

The second saying of Moses lays down the penalty proper to the infringement of the first. But according to Mark it was quoted in the form *he that curseth* (מקלל) instead of *he that dishonoureth* (מקלה). The difference between the Hebrew words is slight enough; but *to curse* is clearly a greater crime than *to dishonour*. If the Greek represent faithfully the form of words used by Jesus, the offence of the penitent is even more unpardonable. He has interdicted himself from the honour of parents, and has also prostituted the Corban formula, using it not merely as an oath, but as a curse. It is a breach of the third and the fourth commandments in one. "If a man revile those whom he ought to bless or in any other way do anything to the dishonour of parents, let him die¹."

The formula of interdiction of benefits as given by Mark is a literal translation of that quoted in the treatise *Nedarim*. There is a story of a man in Bethhoron, who pronounced it against his father, and repented. The vow was irrevocable; and he was overreached by the friend whom he employed to evade it. Such a case is quite exceptional. It was the duty of parents to provide for their children, not of children to provide for their parents. But the benefits for which a parent naturally looks to his son must not be restricted too rigidly to maintenance. There are other practical proofs of the right honouring of father and mother².

Nevertheless, when Philo refers to such as make this vow

¹ Philo.

² See Ecclus. iii.

he mentions only husband, father, and ruler. "If these," he says, "pronounce the nurture due to wife, son, and subject sacred, they must withhold it. It is no longer theirs. *If they repent or correct what they said, then their life also is forfeit*¹."

If a vow be meant in this saying of Jesus, we are shut up to the case of the Nazirite or quasi-Nazirite. If the formula be used as a mere oath or curse, we must consider the case of a man who, in spite of this sin, has prospered while his father fell into want. Once more Philo comes to our aid and states a case in point.

One of the richer class lately embraced an extravagant and luxurious life. An old kinsman or a friend of his father came and admonished him, counselling him to change his mode of life in the direction of a greater seemliness and austerity. Angered immeasurably at the counsel, he swore that he would be as contentious as his betters—that so long as he had the means he would never economize, in town or country, in his travels on land or on water, but always and everywhere he would display his wealth².

Suppose that the father lived and had only given his son the portion of the inheritance which belonged to him—and you have the Parable of the Prodigal Son³ with another ending to serve as an example.

It is written in the Law: "And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? that ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians and delivered our houses." This is the function of the child to get and to keep a firm hold upon the significance of familiar ceremonies, lest they become mere ceremonies and nothing more. And this is also the function of Jesus,

¹ Philo apud Euseb. *Prep. Ev.*, viii. 7.

² Philo, ii, 273 M.

³ Luke xv. 11 ff.

who thanked God that his secrets were revealed unto babes and sucklings. "Vere scire est per causas scire."

Like Socrates at Athens, Jesus went about stirring men, confronting them with their inconsistencies, and compelling them to answer the question, What mean ye by this service—and this—and this?

There is a Baraita—an Agraphon¹: ON THE SAME DAY, JESUS, SEEING ONE WORKING ON THE SABBATH, SAID TO HIM, MAN, IF THOU KNOWEST WHAT THOU DOST BLESSED ART THOU; BUT, IF THOU KNOWEST NOT, CURSED ART THOU, AND A TRANSGRESSOR OF THE LAW.

J. H. A. HART.

¹ Found in Codex Bezae, Luke vi. 5.